Claims

[c1]   What is claimed is:

1.A method to access one or more inactive options resident on a device remotely located from a centralized facility comprising the steps of:

accessing a graphical user interface (GUI) electronically linked to a centralized facility and configured to facilitate selection from a number of option identifying parameters;

selecting at least one of the number of option identifying parameters for identification of one or more inactive options resident on the device; and

transmitting an electronic request for activation of the selected one or more inactive options to the centralized facility.

[c2]   2.The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of authorizing transmission and installation of a software key in response to the electronic request, wherein the software key is configured to activate the one or more inactive options and is transmitted to and installed on the device.

[c3]   3.The method of claim 1 further including the steps of inputting a system ID, a host ID, a client ID, and a password to gain access to the selection step.

[c4]   4.The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of formulating the electronic request by:

inputting a user ID;

inputting a system ID;

selecting a modality;

selecting a software package; and

selecting a usage period.

[c5]   5.The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of requesting use of the one or more inactive options for one of a trial period, a pay–per–use period, a limited access period, and an indefinite period.

[c6]   6.The method of claim 1 further comprising generating a software key if the centralized facility grants access to the inactive option, wherein the software

key is unique for each electronic request.

[c7]   7.The method of claim 2 further comprising the step of transmitting the electronic request via a public communication interface, and wherein the transmission of the software key is via a private communication interface, such that the private communication interface electronically connects the centralized facility to the device.

[c8]   8. The method of claim 1 wherein the software key is an alphanumeric code.

[c9]   9.An access granting system comprising:
a computerized network;
a device having at least one non-enabled software application resident in memory thereon;
a plurality of computers connected to the computerized network, wherein at least one of the plurality of computers displays selection data to a user in a form of a graphical user interface (GUI);
a remote centralized facility electronically connected to the device and having a database, wherein the remote centralized facility includes a computer programmed to:
receive a user ID input;
identify a user selection of the at least one non-enabled software application;
receive a request from an authorized user requesting enablement of the identified user selection;
generate a software enabler designed to permit access to the selected non-enabled software application in accordance with the received request; and
transmit the software enabler from the centralized facility to the device.

[c10]   10.The system of claim 9 wherein the computer of the centralized facility is further programmed to:
receive a host ID input;
receive a system ID input;
identify a modality selection; and
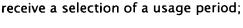decide whether to generate and transmit the software enabler based on the host

ID input, the system ID input, and the modality selection.

[c11]   11.The system of claim 9 wherein the computer of the centralized facility is further programmed to compare the request comprising a system ID, a host ID, a user ID, a selected non-enabled software application; and an identified modality to user and device data stored in the database, and generate the software enabler, wherein the software enabler is specific to the request and non-reusable.

[c12]   12.The system of claim 10 wherein the computer of the centralized facility is further programmed to determine if the user is authorized to operate the selected non-enabled software application.

[c13]   13.The system of claim 9 wherein the device is a medical component including one of a cardiology device, a computed radiology device, a computed tomography device, a magnetic resonance imaging device, an x-ray device, an ultrasound device, a picture archiving and communication device, a nuclear medicine device, and a positron emission tomography device.

[c14]   14.The system of claim 9 wherein the computer of the centralized facility is further programmed to receive a host ID input wherein the host ID corresponds to a physical location of the device.

[c15]   15.The system of claim 9 wherein the GUI is configured to authorize electronic communication between the centralized facility and the device.

[c16]   16.The system of claim 9 wherein a user selection of a modality causes a list of available software applications to be displayed on the GUI.

[c17]
          17.A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave and representing a sequence of instructions which, when executed by at least one processor, causes the at least one processor to:
          display a GUI configured to facilitate a request to enable an inactive option resident on a remote device;
          receive an input of a device identifier;

receive a selection of a usage period;

receive a selection of an inactive option for enablement from the GUI; and

cause a remote centralized processing station to generate a code configured to enable the selected inactive option after successful processing of the received inputs and selections.

[c18]   18.The computer data signal of claim 17 wherein the sequence of instructions further causes the at least one processor to transmit the code to the device having the inactive option.

[c19]   19.The computer data signal of claim 17 wherein the code includes an alphanumeric software key.

[c20]   20.The computer data signal of claim 17 wherein the device is a medical device including one of a cardiology device, a computed radiology device, a computed tomography device, a magnetic resonance imaging device, an x-ray device, an ultrasound device, a picture archiving and communication device, a nuclear medicine device, and a positron emission tomography device.

[c21]   21.The computer data signal of claim 17 wherein the GUI is accessible via a public communication network and configured to permit communication between a user station and the centralized facility.

[c22]   22.The computer data signal of claim 17 wherein the set of instructions further causes the at least one processor to receive an input of a user ID, a client ID, a system ID, a facility ID, and a selection of a device modality and a software package from the GUI.

[c23]   23.The computer data signal of claim 17 wherein the is configured to allow selection of one of a trial use period, a limited use period, a pay-per-use period, and an indefinite use period for the inactive option.

[c24]

24.A GUI to request activation of an inactive software program resident in memory of a medical imaging scanner remotely located from a centralized processing center comprising:

a device modality selector;

a system identification field;

a user identification field;

a software program selector; and

a software key generation tab, whereupon user selection of the software key generation tab transmits a data transmission to the centralized processing center, and wherein the data transmission represents a request to activate the inactive software program resident in memory of the medical imaging scanner.

[c25]   25. The GUI of claim 24 wherein the device modality selector includes a drop-down menu and is configured to display a listing of device modalities including computed tomography, x-ray, magnetic resonance, echocardiography, ultrasound, nuclear medicine, and positron emission tomography.

[c26]   26. The GUI of claim 24 further comprising a period-of-use selector.

[c27]   27. The GUI of claim 26 wherein the period-of-use selector includes a drop-down menu configured to display, in response to a user push-button instruction, a usage period including a trial period usage, a limited-use period usage, a pay-per-use period usage, and an indefinite period usage.

[c28]   28. The GUI of claim 24 wherein the data transmission is configured to represent a request to activate more than one inactive software program resident in memory of the medical imaging scanner.

[c29]   29. The GUI of claim 24 further comprising a generate-and-receive button, wherein a user selection of the generate-and-receive button creates the data transmission and represents an authorization to request generation of a software key at the centralized processing center and transmit the software key to the medical imaging scanner.